

# INSPECTION REPORT

**NITAL**

**13 October 2005**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

### Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

## Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

## Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

# INSPECTION REPORT

## NITAL

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# INSPECTION REPORT

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Northamptonshire Industrial Training Association Limited (NITAL) is a charitable organisation founded in 1969. Its previous purpose was to administer and manage the training and development of engineers throughout Northamptonshire. NITAL has approximately 300 member companies, which together with a Board of Trustees help shape, guide and manage the business. NITAL contracts with Northamptonshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). While NITAL's core business still encompasses engineering and its associated qualifications, the scope of the training has expanded. It now offers apprenticeships and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in business administration, customer service, distribution and warehouse operations, motor vehicle, electrical installation, accountancy, plus foundation programmes in literacy and numeracy, and Entry to Employment (E2E). NITAL's office is in Corby. The organisation has recently relocated to ensure that it better serves its customers by providing more modern and accessible facilities. As part of this restructuring, premises in Northampton town centre have been closed, commercial activities have been streamlined, some staff have been made redundant and the vocational team has been refocused. All of this took place during the period leading up to the inspection.

2. Northamptonshire is a mix of urban and rural settlements. The main employment sectors are wholesale and retail, financial and business services, manufacturing, public services, and health and social work. Logistics has grown by 46 per cent since 1998. The unemployment rate in Northamptonshire is lower than the regional and national averages. It is easy for young people to enter employment, much of which has no training attached, and post-16 progression rates are affected. Equally, a high proportion of adults without level 2 qualifications are in the workforce rather than being unemployed. Northamptonshire has a buoyant economy and areas of considerable affluence along with significant pockets of deprivation.

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 4**

3. **The overall effectiveness of provision is inadequate.** NITAL's leadership and management are inadequate, as are its arrangements for quality improvement. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Provision is inadequate in engineering and manufacturing technologies, but satisfactory in construction, planning and the built environment, and business administration and law.

4. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is an inclusive process, drawing on the views of staff, evaluations, audits and the various questionnaires used to assess the quality of provision. The current self-assessment report is relatively accurate in its identification of strengths and weaknesses but does not properly judge the effect of these. Self-assessment makes insufficient use of data on retention and achievement. There is no annual self-assessment

cycle which identifies key dates when particular processes take place. The current self-assessment report is overly descriptive. The self-assessment development plan focuses only on dealing with weaknesses. It is difficult to identify how the various improvement activities relate to the self-assessment. NITAL has not been realistic in judging the effect of the overall low retention and achievement rates.

**5. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a poor position to make improvements.**

Retention and achievement rates have declined since the previous inspection, as have inspection grades. Although some weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been rectified, important weaknesses such as learners' progress reviews, target-setting and the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training have not. The self-assessment report and associated development plan, while relatively accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses, have not been successful in improving provision.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR NITAL:

- make progress reviews more effective
- improve retention and achievement rates
- improve co-ordination of training and assessment
- introduce effective quality improvement strategies
- improve operational planning
- increase reinforcement of equality of opportunity in the workplace

## GRADES

*grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate*

Leadership and management		4
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		4

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<b>Engineering</b>		<b>4</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	104	4	

Construction, planning and the built environment			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<b>Building services</b>		<b>3</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	15	3	

Business administration and law		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Accounting and finance</b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	1	3
NVQ training for young people	2	3
<b>Administration</b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	19	3
<b>Customer service</b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	3	3

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. A team of six inspectors spent 22 days with NITAL during October 2005. In the period leading up to the final inspection week, three additional visits were made to observe off-the-job training at NITAL's headquarters Corby and to establish the quality of off-the-job training at the main subcontractor, Northampton College of Further Education. Inspectors did not grade and report on the recently introduced E2E programme. This inspection was delayed by three months to give NITAL time to consolidate after its recent reorganisation.

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	25
Number of learners interviewed	76
Number of staff interviewed	19
Number of employers interviewed	26
Number of subcontractors interviewed	2
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	36

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievements and standards

7. **In all areas of learning, learners develop good vocational skills and knowledge.** They work in a wide range of companies where they experience a suitable range of work. Many learners are taking on high levels of responsibility. Work placements are of a good quality and support progression and skills development.

8. **Construction learners working in electrical installation attain good practical skills,** performing some higher-level work tasks, often unsupervised. Retention rates are good, as are completion rates for apprentices. Advanced apprentices complete their frameworks at a satisfactory rate.

9. **Retention and achievement rates are poor on all engineering and manufacturing**

**technologies programmes.** Few advanced apprentices recruited since 2002-03 have achieved and only a quarter remain in learning. Less than 20 per cent of apprentices starting programmes since 2002-03 have achieved their qualification and only 12 per cent remain in learning.

10. In business, administration and law, learners follow a range of programmes such as administration, accountancy and customer services. Retention and achievement rates vary between programmes and years, but are satisfactory overall.

11. The key skills qualification achievement rate has improved recently. These qualifications are no longer subcontracted. Learners attend additional key skills sessions where needed.

### The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	0	3	1	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>

12. **Most practical and background knowledge teaching in engineering and manufacturing technologies is good.** All of this is subcontracted to a local college where the resources are good. Teaching sessions mostly cater for the needs of individuals and use a range of teaching methods. Electricians also benefit from the same background knowledge and practical teaching arrangements.

13. In business, administration and law, most training takes place in the workplace. Off-the-job training sessions are available but **some learners have poor access to these sessions.** These learners miss the opportunity to learn with other apprentices and enhance their apprenticeship.

14. In all areas, induction is satisfactory. It gives useful information on equality of opportunity and health and safety. Initial assessment is not consistently applied, however, with poor use made of assessment results.

15. The planning of individual learning is inadequate. Individual learning plans are not sufficiently guided by initial assessment. Additional support arrangements are vague. Learners and employers do not have a clear understanding of apprenticeship requirements.

16. **On all programmes, progress reviews are inadequate.** They do not set sufficiently focused and challenging targets. They do not always involve those people who can influence learners' progress.

17. With the exception of business, administration and law, **planning of assessment in the workplace is inadequate.** Assessment plan targets are weak. Many learners are observed infrequently. Overall, workplace performance is not observed often enough. Many good assessment opportunities are not taken.

18. **On- and off-the-job training are not sufficiently co-ordinated.** Many employers do not understand the apprenticeship. Many good learning and assessment opportunities are



not taken.

19. The range of programmes and progression routes is appropriate to the needs of learners and local employers. Some learners find the arrangements for travel to and from college difficult.

20. **Learners receive good support in the workplace from employers' own staff and training advisers.** In some cases, this has been successful in keeping learners involved on the programme. Additional learning support is satisfactory, where needs are identified and support is put in place. Training advisers support learners during their visits to the workplace.

21. **The monitoring of learners' progress is inadequate.** Staff make regular visits to the subcontractor but place excessive emphasis on attendance issues. In general, learners' progress is only reported on once a term. NITAL makes insufficient effort to monitor progress and achievement on a routine basis and link this with learners' progress reviews, individual learning plans and target-setting.

### **Leadership and management**

22. **NITAL's board members provide a good level of support for recently appointed managers** who are working within a considerably restructured environment. Managers make regular reports and board members meet managers regularly to supervise progress. Specialist support is provided that covers health and safety and personal matters.

23. **Operational and business planning is weak.** NITAL has not converted its new strategic plan into a deliverable and reviewable operational plan. Responsibilities and timescales have not been identified. The quality improvement plan only focuses on weaknesses.

24. **Insufficient targeting takes place to improve retention and achievement rates.** Some staff are monitored monthly and set targets, but these are weak. NITAL's board does not receive sufficient information on trends in retention and achievement rates.

25. **The continuity of staffing is poor.** A key staff member has been absent and many members of staff are relatively inexperienced. Many important functions relating to training can only be maintained at a minimum level. NITAL has very little spare capacity to initiate improvements. Staff turnover has been higher than normal recently.

26. Internal communications are satisfactory. Staff regularly meet informally and formally. Records of meetings are comprehensive but actions following these meetings are not adequately monitored.

27. **The collection and analysis of data is inadequate.** The management information system is only used for data in relation to the LSC contract. Financial records and reports are good but no reports are produced showing trends in retention and achievement rates. Staff have great difficulty in measuring this performance and do not routinely use data reports as part of day-to-day management.

28. Staff development and training are satisfactory. Appraisal takes place annually. Staff

have access to a good range of training opportunities.

29. **NITAL promotes equality of opportunity well when learners start training.** The topic is covered well at induction and most learners have a good recall of the information covered. NITAL collects employers' policies and procedures on equal opportunities. Its own policies and procedures in relation to equal opportunities are satisfactory and adequately cover current aspects of legislation.

30. The organisation's collection and analysis of data in relation to equality of opportunity is satisfactory. It uses the data to identify recruitment trends and has introduced a good range of initiatives to widen participation. Relationships with local partners and schools are used to good effect in recruitment.

31. **Insufficient ongoing monitoring takes place of equality of opportunity in the workplace.** Insufficient attention has been paid to removing inappropriate images in the workplace, and monitoring questions do not stretch or challenge learners' understanding of the subject.

32. NITAL has developed a useful range of evaluation methods, but these focus mainly on audit and compliance. Observations of teaching and reviews take place. Arrangements for collecting feedback from learners and employers are satisfactory. Employers' forums have recently been introduced.

33. **Quality improvement strategies are inadequate.** They place insufficient focus on improving retention and achievement rates, and too much on compliance against contracts. The quality group meets regularly but spends too much time looking at the results of audits and insufficient time looking at quality improvement strategies.

34. Self-assessment is satisfactory. It has taken place for a number of years and draws on information from a good range of sources. Self-assessment makes insufficient use of data on retention and achievement. Where strengths and weakness have been identified, their effect on learners has been insufficiently judged. Development planning only focuses on weaknesses.

35. The monitoring of subcontractors is satisfactory. Meetings take place regularly. NITAL responds well in dealing with difficulties experienced by learners when they are with the subcontractor.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- good support from board members
- good early promotion of equality of opportunity

### **Weaknesses**

- poor operational planning
- poor use of targets to improve retention and achievement rates
- insufficient staff resources

- inadequate collection and analysis of data
- inadequate quality improvement actions
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace

## **Engineering and manufacturing technologies**

### ***Engineering***

***Grade 4***

#### *Strengths*

- good development of knowledge and skills
- good teaching
- good off-the-job training resources

#### *Weaknesses*

- poor retention and achievement rates
- insufficient planning and co-ordination of training in the workplace
- weak progress reviews
- inadequate planning of workplace assessment

## **Construction, planning and the built environment**

### ***Building services***

***Grade 3***

#### *Strengths*

- good support from employers
- good attainment of practical skills
- good retention and achievement rates for apprentices and NVQ learners

#### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient planning and co-ordination of workplace training
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress
- weak progress reviews

## **Business administration and law**

#### *Strengths*

- well-supported learners and employers
- good-quality workplaces supporting progression and skills development

*Weaknesses*

- insufficient off-the-job learning
- weak progress reviews

**WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NITAL:**

- the support they receive from employers
- the combination of work and training
- the great opportunities - 'I have learnt a lot and developed my skills'
- working with good people and getting to know new people
- the chance to gain qualifications and the good training prospects
- the regular visits from NITAL's staff who are 'responsive to needs'
- the contactable assessors who explain everything well

**WHAT LEARNERS THINK NITAL COULD IMPROVE:**

- the time allocated at work to complete log books
- the range of jobs at work
- the amount of focused training at work
- the number of assessment visits
- the amount of support from workshop supervisors
- the travel arrangements between college sites
- the amount of practical work at college
- the number of cancelled visits
- the amount of off-the-job training and opportunities to meet other learners
- the provision by employers of time to attend induction or off-the-job training in the daytime

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 4**

#### Strengths

- good support from board members
- good early promotion of equality of opportunity

#### Weaknesses

- poor operational planning
- poor use of targets to improve retention and achievement rates
- insufficient staff resources
- inadequate collection and analysis of data
- inadequate quality improvement actions
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace

36. NITAL's board meets every six weeks and more often if needed, and provides good support. During a recent period of significant restructuring when NITAL closed an office, relocated operations to one building, made some staff redundant and terminated its commercial activities, the board has given particularly good levels of specialist support in personnel and financial management matters. Some board members give additional time to support key processes such as the observation of training, and advice on health and safety. The operations manager has only recently been promoted within NITAL, and so receives good levels of individual support from the chairman of the board. Recently, the company has faced some major challenges and the board members have been active in formulating a new three-year strategic plan. The board recognises that it needs to develop more external partners and recruit new members. The operations manager produces reports for the board every six weeks, and is also the company secretary. Minutes from board meetings are well recorded, although during recent times they have focused mainly on financial performance and staffing matters.

37. The operational planning process is weak. The three-year strategic plan set overall visions for the future with short-term aims. While these are good, no effort has been put into setting out how these will be delivered. NITAL has no operational plan which breaks overall aims down into more achievable objectives and individual actions. Responsibilities and timescales have not yet been identified. No means exist by which managers and the board will be able to monitor accurately and systematically progress in delivering the strategic plan. Reporting lines have not been established. The organisation has drawn up a development plan to tackle weaknesses identified through self-assessment. This does not consider how strengths will be maintained and satisfactory aspects improved. Timescales, responsibilities and success criteria are often difficult to measure.

38. Insufficient targeting of staff members' performance takes place to improve retention and achievement rates. NITAL has introduced a system of monthly staff reviews but this has not yet been applied to all staff. During these reviews, staff are given targets in relation to their individual workload. These are based on a review of each learner's progress in

completing their individual learning plan. Assessors are set targets such as the assessment of a number of NVQ units. Training needs are identified and general issues around staff performance recorded. Where a member of staff does not meet their targets, they are not sufficiently challenged to improve. Too often, managers accept staff members' reasons for why things have not been done.

39. Continuity of staff resources is poor. One key member of staff has been absent for a lengthy period of time and this is having a negative effect. For example, little planned monitoring takes place of the employees who work under this member of staff. Internal verification has had to be subcontracted out and when the subcontractor became unavailable, an unqualified member of staff carried out internal verification supported by another internal verifier who was not a subject specialist. The recent period of restructuring has adversely affected staff, with a higher than normal turnover rate and many relatively inexperienced staff performing important roles. Some learners complain about frequent changes in the staff who support them and review their progress.

40. Internal communications are satisfactory. A useful range of well-attended internal meetings includes the monthly team meeting and the quarterly quality meeting. In addition there are health and safety, and marketing meetings. Staff are kept well informed about operational matters and standard agendas ensure that equality of opportunity, quality, performance, and health and safety are discussed. Minutes are well recorded but provide excessive amounts of superficial information with few detailed follow-up action points. It is difficult to establish how agreed improvement actions are carried out. NITAL produces a useful newsletter which provides learners and staff with a variety of relevant information.

41. The collection and analysis of data is inadequate. Although a useful range of information is recorded on the management information system, this is not used to measure the progress of learners towards their qualification. Other than financial returns to the LSC, the only reports produced from the management information are monthly lists of learners which are distributed to staff during team meetings. There is no analysis of the reasons why learners leave their programmes early. Progress towards the NVQ and other qualifications is not recorded. NITAL does not use management information to show trends in retention and achievement rates, each individual learners' progress, the relative performance of different staff members and groups of learners or other information to assist marketing and recruitment. For the past year, a monthly report has been produced which lists the number of leavers, showing reasons why they left the programme early. This is not analysed to give managers information on trends and reasons. It is not used to target improvement actions. A company-wide system for monitoring learners' achievement on a unit-by-unit basis is being developed. The only measure of performance used by NITAL is in relation to profiles set out in its contract with the LSC. Board members only receive information relating to financial and contractual performance.

42. Staff development and training is satisfactory. Staff receive an annual appraisal annually which is used to identify training needs. They can access a good range of relevant training, such as health and safety awareness, assessors' qualifications, verifiers' awards and, where appropriate, additional NVQs. Some staff were apprentices with NITAL in the past. With a high staff turnover, many staff members are relatively new and inexperienced. These staff receive reduced workloads and higher levels of personal supervision.

**Equality of opportunity****Contributory grade 3**

43. Learners receive good early training in equality of opportunity. NITAL uses the two-day induction well to provide learners with training on equality and diversity. A simple but effective policy statement is included as part of the learners' induction training, backed up by a range of detailed guidance. Very good use is made of video materials showing the effects of different types of discrimination in a range of practical situations. Examples include bullying and harassment and discrimination on the grounds of physical disability, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, sex and race. These examples are used well to gather individual responses and promote group discussion on the issues raised. Induction packs also include guidance on local and national organisations providing support on a range of personal issues including benefits, housing, substance misuse, pregnancy and child protection. Most learners, even those who have been on programme in excess of two years, have good recall of this training. Most learners have a good awareness and understanding of equality and diversity issues. More specifically, some learners are able to discuss their rights and responsibilities and how to deal with issues such as bullying, harassment and discrimination as they relate to the working environment. NITAL provides employers with a detailed guidance pack which clearly states the roles and responsibilities of employers. This is recognised in the self-assessment report.

44. A comprehensive equal opportunities policy is in place for staff and learners. It is up to date, and refers to recent and relevant legislation. Overall responsibility for equality of opportunity lies with the operations manager. A detailed equal opportunities action plan is in place which correctly identifies key issues for NITAL. A satisfactory complaints procedure is in place, of which learners are aware. Where this procedure is used, staff from NITAL carry out investigations and provide detailed responses. Training for staff is satisfactory. Key members of staff attend external equality and diversity training, such as courses provided by the LSC. These staff effectively disseminate the content of these courses to colleagues through staff meetings and training update sessions.

45. NITAL uses a good range of measures in its attempts to improve the participation of under-represented groups, particularly in engineering. This is identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Recruitment officers have good relationships with local schools, colleges and Connexions, and attend many careers events, which they use well to promote engineering to women. Promotional leaflets, designed to break down stereotypical views and attract applicants from under-represented groups, are widely distributed. A female engineer employed by NITAL also provides a good role model and features in the organisation's marketing material. Recruitment officers continue to attempt to work with a local African-Caribbean association. However, these initiatives have met with little success. NITAL has established an equal opportunities committee, though this is yet to be fully effective.

46. NITAL's use of data to monitor equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Its monitoring of applications for programmes is good. Detailed analysis is well established and shows the fluctuations in applications from under-represented groups. Recently extended to include analysis of learners starting programmes, and of qualification outcomes, only one year's data has been analysed and performance comparisons cannot yet be made. This is identified as strength in the self-assessment report.

47. NITAL has a strategy for skills for life, the government's initiative on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language, which clearly sets out the organisation's current



position. The strategy refers to government targets, but the accompanying development plan gives no indication of how NITAL will contribute to these targets. It refers instead to organisational procedures and policies. The organisation is aware of the importance of providing additional learning support for literacy, numeracy and language, although its provision is not always well recorded. However, NITAL provides an appropriate level of support for most learners and some achieve a higher level of literacy and numeracy qualification than their qualifications require.

48. Monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace is insufficient. This is not identified in the self-assessment report. Although NITAL obtains copies of the equal opportunities policies of employers, some of these date back to 1999 and there is little monitoring of their effectiveness. Insufficient actions have been taken to rectify areas of concern. For example, NITAL is aware that some organisations display many inappropriate images and has written a general reminder to all companies about their roles and responsibilities in promoting equality of opportunity. However, such images continue to be displayed. Although equality of opportunity is included as a discussion topic within learners' progress reviews, it is not dealt with in detail. Questions are asked from a bank of questions, but answers are often cursory and do not lead to further debate.

## **Quality improvement**

## **Contributory grade 4**

49. NITAL places inadequate focus on the effect of quality improvement in raising retention and achievement rates, which have declined over the past four years. Weaknesses identified at the previous inspection remain. The organisation's improvement actions following observation of key processes and evaluation of feedback are not rigorous enough. Although the outcomes of these evaluations are discussed, these discussions mainly focus on the extent to which arrangements comply with systems and procedures. Most minutes of meetings include discussion on quality but frequently this does not extend beyond the discussion of a quality report. NITAL does not take enough action to resolve identified weaknesses and monitor the effectiveness of quality improvement initiatives. The quality group spends too much time focusing on the results of quality audits and does not prioritise actions. The terms of reference of the quality group are not clear and too much time is spent discussing operational matters. The recently appointed operations manager plans to redefine the terms of reference for the various committees. A recently introduced quality strategy defines roles and responsibilities, and briefly outlines the main quality improvement measures such as audits and self-assessment. This has not been in place long enough to have any effect and makes no reference to the role of the quality committee.

50. The current self-assessment is overly descriptive. Where strengths and weaknesses are identified, these are insufficiently judgemental. The self-assessment development plan focuses only on dealing with weaknesses. The self-assessment process makes insufficient use of data and NITAL has not been realistic in judging the effect of the overall low levels of retention and achievement. It is difficult to identify how various improvement activities relate to the self-assessment. The self-assessment process has taken place for a number of years and is co-ordinated by the operations manager. It draws on the views of staff, evaluations, audits and the various questionnaires used to assess the quality of provision. There is no annual self-assessment cycle which identifies key dates when particular self-assessment processes are to take place. The draft self-assessment report is shared with staff and the board.

51. NITAL uses a range of evaluation methods but these mainly assure the quality of

provision and check for compliance, and have not led to quality improvements. NITAL's managers, and recently its board members, observe off-the-job training sessions as part of the monitoring of subcontractors. There are useful records and summary notes of discussions following these activities but few examples of follow-up improvement actions. Induction sessions are observed and, where identified, necessary improvements are made. Learners' reviews have recently been included within the observation schedule. There are plans to observe on-the-job training, although NITAL has not yet established how this will be done. Recently, managers have reviewed and updated policies and procedures for the various key training processes. The procedures manual is comprehensive but also confusing, as procedures for the learning process are mixed with those relating to staffing and financial matters. An audit schedule has been introduced and compliance checks regularly take place.

52. Arrangements for collecting feedback are satisfactory. Learners receive questionnaires following induction and twice a year after that. Different questionnaires are used to collect relevant information on different aspects of the training programme. Response rates are very low despite incentives being offered. The information is analysed and a report showing the key messages is circulated for discussion at team meeting. An action plan is produced but there is little follow-up action. Employers are issued with questionnaires annually, the response rates to which are satisfactory. This information is also analysed and circulated. NITAL has introduced employers' forums as part of a move to increase employers' levels of engagement. Attendance was satisfactory at the first of these meetings, which was designed to fit around employers' diary requirements. A further forum is planned. NITAL has made no formal arrangements to collect and analyse its employees' views, although an analysis of company strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was used when NITAL was formulating its new strategic plan.

53. The monitoring of subcontractors is satisfactory. Clear service level agreements exist which define key roles and responsibilities. NITAL is becoming more active in its management of subcontractors, although some difficulties persist. Regular meetings take place between NITAL's managers and subcontractor representatives. These concentrate on monitoring learners' progress while at college. They do not sufficiently challenge the mode of delivery and ways in which achievement rates can be improved. NITAL seeks to have a subcontractor representative as a board member. It has good systems to deal with learners' and employers' complaints, most of which have related to learners' experiences at the subcontractor. In most cases, a satisfactory resolution to complaints has been reached. In most cases, the complaint revolves around inadequate arrangements to inform employers and learners of their key responsibilities and how the training programme operates. Quality improvement arrangements have not identified actions necessary to prevent such complaints. Too many measures for improvement are taken in reaction to problems, rather than to prevent them.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering and manufacturing technologies

**Grade 4**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Engineering</b> Apprenticeships for young people	104	<b>4</b> 4

54. There are 104 engineering and manufacturing technologies learners, of whom 27 are advanced apprentices, 62 are apprentices and 15 are on other work-based learning NVQ programmes. Fifty-four learners are following qualifications in mechanical and electrical engineering, 13 learners in manufacturing technologies and 25 learners in motor vehicle repair and maintenance. The duration of programmes is up to 42 months for advanced apprenticeships and 24 months for apprenticeships and NVQs. All learners are employed, being recruited either directly from employers or through Connexions. NITAL works with small, medium-sized and multinational companies. Off-the-job practical and technical certificate training is subcontracted, with Northampton College of Further Education the main subcontractor. This college is responsible for motor vehicle assessment and internal verification. Mechanical engineering apprentices attend college full time in their first year, working towards a performing engineering operations qualification at level 2. Fabrication and welding apprentices and some motor vehicle apprentices attend day-release classes for off-the-job training for their technical certificate. Most motor vehicle apprentices attend off-the-job training on block release for one week in every six. NITAL delivers key skills training for apprentices at its headquarters in Corby. All learners attend a two-day induction at the start of their programme which includes an initial assessment of key skills and diagnostic testing. Induction also includes health and safety, equality of opportunity, the structure of the NVQ, teambuilding exercises and the apprenticeship frameworks. Employers provide learners with a further workplace induction. NITAL's training advisers and learner support officer are responsible for the individual support for learners in the workplace, ensuring progress reviews are carried out. On mechanical engineering programmes training advisers also carry out learners' assessments in the workplace.

### **Engineering**

**Grade 4**

#### *Strengths*

- good development of knowledge and skills
- good teaching
- good off-the-job training resources

#### *Weaknesses*

- poor retention and achievement rates
- insufficient planning and co-ordination of training in the workplace
- weak progress reviews
- inadequate planning of workplace assessment

## Achievement and standards

55. Learners develop good vocational skills and knowledge. They are allocated to experienced and qualified engineers and technicians. Some employers' staff have themselves achieved NVQs and are able to support learners in collecting evidence and portfolio-building.

56. Portfolios are satisfactory with detailed job reports. Supervisors are sensitive to learners' needs and gradually develop their skills, beginning with simple tasks and graduating onto more complex tasks as their skills improve. Levels of supervision are decreased as learners gain more confidence and become competent. For example, apprentices programme computer numerically controlled (CNC) machinery and others carry out vehicle servicing and unit removal and replacement. Some apprentices achieve additional qualifications in health and safety, first aid, abrasive wheels and working in confined spaces. One major employer requires apprentices to achieve qualifications in both electrical and mechanical engineering. One employer is sending an apprentice on a machine tool manufacturers' training course.

57. Retention and achievement rates are poor on all programmes. Of the advanced apprentices in engineering who started in 2002-03, none have achieved and only 25 per cent are still in learning. Of the engineering apprentices who started in 2002-03, 12 per cent remain in learning and 19 per cent have achieved successfully. NVQ achievement rates for engineering learners are poor for 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03. The achievement rate for learners starting in these three years has averaged 36 per cent. Of the motor vehicle advanced apprentices who started in 2000-01, 13 per cent are still in learning and only 13 per cent have successfully achieved. Of the motor vehicle apprentices who started in 2002-03, 11 per cent are still in learning and only 22 per cent have successfully achieved their qualification.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	4		9		13	100	10	100	12	100	10	100				
Retained*	0		0		2	15	2	20	8	67	4	40				
Successfully completed	0		0		1	8	1	10	8	67	3	30				
Still in learning	4		8		11	85	2	20	1	8	1	10				

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	17		56	100	27	100	26	100	6	100	1	100				
Retained*	0		1	2	11	41	15	58	6	100	1	100				
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0	0	5	19	2	33	1	100				
Still in learning	17		29	52	13	48	3	12	0	0	0	0				

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	15		0	100	9	100	7	100	7	100	13	100				
Retained*	0		0	100	4	44	3	43	7	100	7	54				
Successfully completed	0		0	100	3	33	2	29	4	57	4	31				
Still in learning	14		0	100	1	11	0	0	0	0	0	0				

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

## The quality of provision

58. Practical and background knowledge teaching is good at NITAL and Northampton College of Further Education. Sessions are planned well with clear learning objectives for learners' participation. There is a thorough recap of learners' knowledge from previous sessions, during which learners demonstrate good recall. In background knowledge sessions, exposition is clear and suitably paced using appropriate language that learners understand. Learners are kept challenged and more able learners are given additional work. In one background knowledge session on identification of materials, team teaching was used effectively. Learners' knowledge and understanding are frequently monitored through effective open questioning. Teachers and trainers have good relationships with their learners and create a relaxed atmosphere that promotes learning. Most learners are enthusiastic and highly motivated. However, some learners are not encouraged to think for themselves, receiving too much direction from the trainer. Demonstrations to groups of learners and individual coaching are used effectively in practical sessions. Learners produce good-quality work to industry standards.

59. Resources for off-the-job training are good. The range of equipment is in good condition, representing industrial standards, and in many cases is the same as that used by learners in their workplaces. The motor vehicle maintenance and body repair and refinishing workshops are equipped with high-quality training units, vehicle components and computerised diagnostic equipment. Motor vehicles are adequate and represent modern styles and systems. Computer-aided technology is well resourced, with a CNC manufacturing cell, rapid prototyping equipment and a large provision of high-specification computers with up-to-date computer-aided design software. The welding workshops are spacious with individual workbays with a wide range of current equipment.

60. Training in the workplace is not sufficiently planned and co-ordinated. Learners are

allocated to experienced engineering supervisors but many have little understanding of the apprenticeship programme. Most learners are given work to meet their company's production needs with little consideration of how they can collect evidence for their portfolio. Some supervisors are unable to give their learner sufficient time for training due to company production needs, preventing these learners from making good progress. One major employer with six apprentices has recently developed a training programme with NITAL's training adviser for learners to work for three months in different departments. Learners say they have made better progress since its introduction. However, the training programme does not give specific learning objectives linked to the apprenticeship framework. Employers receive college reports on learners' performance but are not provided with specific details of day-release training programmes. This prevents employers and workplace supervisors from allocating work to assist learners' progress, achievement and understanding related to their technical certificates.

61. Learners' progress reviews are weak. This weakness remains from the previous inspection. The learner support officer visits learners every 12 weeks. In addition, training advisers and assessors visit learners for assessment and action-planning. There is little co-ordination between the learner support officer and training advisers and assessors. Learners are confused by this. Most action plans are weak and do not set learners challenging targets to help them make progress towards achieving their qualification. Employers are not adequately involved in agreeing action plans and targets. Reference to previous action plans is not always made and often it is not clear if previous actions are completed. Questioning techniques are poor and elicit little response from learners. No reference is made to individual learning plans when setting targets.

62. The two-day learners' induction and initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners have a good recall of this. Initial assessment results, prior achievements and support requirements are not properly recorded in individual learning plans. Learners' achievement of key skills qualifications or NVQ units is not systematically recorded in individual learning plans. Some learners are not aware of their individual learning plan. Although learners and employers receive a copy of the individual learning plan, many plans are incomplete and not updated. Arrangements to support learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills are satisfactory. Training advisers support learners with their literacy, numeracy and language skills and assessment portfolios during visits to the workplace.

63. Assessment planning is inadequate. Learners do not receive enough visits to support them with the collection of portfolio assessment evidence. Insufficient observation takes place of learners' workplace performance. Assessors typically visit learners every three to four months. Many apprentices only have one observation in their first year. One learner has only been observed twice in two years, and one has received only three assessments in 18 months. Much assessment on motor vehicle programmes is opportunistic and takes place at very short notice, sometimes as little as one or two days. Some employers find this particularly intrusive and opportunities to provide effective assessment opportunities are very limited. In motor vehicle there is no progressive internal verification of evidence contained in portfolios. When engineering assessment does take place, it is effective and results in detailed and comprehensive reports which clearly inform the learner of the result of the assessment. In engineering some assessment decisions have not been verified for 12 months.

## Leadership and management

64. Equality and diversity are not sufficiently promoted among learners and employers in the workplace. Work-based learners are provided with an equal opportunities policy in their apprenticeship handbook, together with various booklets at induction. The review process does not feature a check on the learners' understanding of equality and diversity. Learners are only asked simple questions and these do not result in discussion or a test of understanding. Employers are not monitored on their adherence to their own equal opportunities policy or NITAL's policy in the absence of their own. For the past two years there has been work with school pupils to introduce them into engineering. NITAL's human and physical resources are generally satisfactory. However, the organisation is experiencing difficulties in recruiting an internal verifier and learners' progress has been affected. One training adviser is working towards an internal verification qualification, but no-one is currently available to countersign the unqualified verifier's decisions.

65. Employers express a good level of satisfaction with the service that NITAL provides. Communications between NITAL and its learners, employers and subcontractors are satisfactory. The procedures for self-assessment are satisfactory with all staff involved in identifying key issues, but the self-assessment report and its subsequent action plan do not identify many of the weaknesses identified by inspectors. For example, the weaknesses around progress reviews, verification and assessment are not identified. Many of the weaknesses from the previous inspection, in areas including assessment, progress reviews and retention rates, remain.



**Construction, planning and the built environment****Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Building services</b>		<b>3</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	15	3

66. NITAL recruits, monitors and manages the training of 15 construction, planning and the built environment learners within Northamptonshire. They currently work with 12 employers and recruitment is mainly through company referral or through Connexions. Ten learners are advanced apprentices on a four-year programme and five are apprentices on a two-year programme. All learners attend one of two local colleges on a day-release basis. The colleges deliver and assess both the NVQ and additional academic qualifications, and college staff carry out internal verification. NITAL delivers the induction and carries out the initial assessment of learners' needs, and visits each group at college on a weekly basis to review site-diary work. NITAL's staff also assess key skills qualifications, with a significant amount carried out in the workplace. Some learners take key skills qualifications at a higher level than that demanded by the qualification framework. Learners' progress is reviewed every 12 weeks by NITAL's training advisers.

**Building services****Grade 3***Strengths*

- good support from employers
- good attainment of practical skills
- good retention and achievement rates for apprentices and NVQ learners

*Weaknesses*

- insufficient planning and co-ordination of workplace training
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress
- weak progress reviews

**Achievement and standards**

67. Retention and achievement rates are good. Of the 28 learners who have joined programmes since 2000-01, only two have left early. Eight out of 14 learners who stayed for the planned duration of their framework have successfully completed it, although a further two went on to complete it later. This shows an achievement rate of 71 per cent. However, most learners make slow progress. The apprenticeship takes as many as five years to complete. Some learners have started their level 3 programme before they finished their level 2 qualification.

68. Learners attain good practical skills that are often above the level expected of them at their stage of training. For example, one level 3 learner was carrying out diagnostic testing in large commercial premises without supervision, and one learner in training for only six weeks was performing second-fix electrical work on a house extension. One learner who had just completed two years of training was able to independently carry out vehicle



fabrication and electrical fitting to commercial standards. All learners were able to gain the range of skills required to satisfactorily complete a site diary, which is a major assessment requirement. Learners in training at level 2 and level 3 displayed confidence and well-developed social skills with customers and experienced work colleagues.

69. Key skills attainment is satisfactory. Problems existed with the provision of key skills training by the college. NITAL has now taken over the delivery and assessment of key skills qualifications, which are mainly carried out in the workplace. Some learners are now completing their key skills ahead of target.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	0	100	5		0	100	1	100								
Retained*	0	100	0		0	100	0	0								
Successfully completed	0	100	0		0	100	0	0								
Still in learning	0	100	5		0	100	0	0								

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	4		2		2	100	4	100								
Retained*	0		0		2	100	4	100								
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	2	50								
Still in learning	4		2		2	100	2	50								

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	0	0	0	100	1	100	2	100	6	100	1	100				
Retained*	0	100	0	100	0	0	2	100	5	83	1	100				
Successfully completed	0	100	0	100	0	0	2	100	4	67	0	0				
Still in learning	0	100	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

## The quality of provision

70. Employers' support for learners is good. Employers provide a wide range of learning opportunities and allow learners to work with other employers to gain evidence for their site diary. Learners have regular performance reviews, often more frequently than required.

Reviews provide effective pastoral support, with learners being aware of how to ask for further help and advice on welfare concerns. The college had informed one learner that they had not received his site diary. The training adviser obtained the diary from the college and ensured the learner completed the work required and returned the diary for assessment.

71. The NVQ and academic qualification is subcontracted out to one of two colleges. Only one lesson observation has been carried out of learners in a teaching session. This was well planned with good participation by the learners. The more able learners assisted other less confident learners.

72. The apprenticeship programme satisfactorily meets the needs of learners and their employers. On-site training and off-the-job training at college are appropriate to the needs of the industry. Employers feel that the skills learners gain will enable them to progress within the industry. Learners enjoy their work and appreciate the range of activities available to them. Health and safety is satisfactorily dealt with by the college and by NITAL.

73. The induction programme is satisfactory. Learners who have been in learning for over three years are able to recall the main components of a two-day induction covering health and safety, equality of opportunity and team-building exercises. However, one learner was six weeks into his training programme and had still not attended a planned induction at NITAL's training centre.

74. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners undergo the assessment as part of their induction and it is effective in identifying additional support needs. Learners who are identified as having traits associated with dyslexia are referred for a dyslexia assessment which identifies the specific support required. Satisfactory strategies are in place within NITAL to offer additional learning support and this is provided when required. However, the application of initial assessment in relation to key skills is often inconsistent. In one example, a learner with good general certificate of secondary education passes was provided with an initial assessment at level 1 despite needing to complete key skills at level 2 as part of the apprenticeship. Other learners identified as having key skills exemptions were still required to do key skills qualifications.

75. Progress reviews are weak. Although these take place frequently, they add little of value to the training process. Discussions at progress reviews focus excessively on the pastoral needs of learners and make little reference to actions and targets in relation to progression and attainment. Progress reviews are not linked to the overall targets set out in learners' individual learning plans. Insufficient focus is placed on vocational skills. In one review, a learner informed his training adviser that he was currently developing skills in gas fitting, but was asked no questions about risk assessment or other health and safety matters, given that the main subject was electrical installation.

76. The monitoring of learners' progress towards their NVQ is inadequate. NITAL does not maintain accurate records to show how much learners have achieved. Assessment for the NVQ is the responsibility of the college. The college carries out assessment effectively and informs NITAL of each learner's progress. However, assessment planning and associated target-setting are not part of learners' reviews, which are carried out by NITAL independently of the college. NITAL has insufficient information as to what workplace assessment is needed. The college is responsive to assessment initiated by learners and

provides assessment details to learners to enable them to identify assessment opportunities in advance. NITAL performs insufficient monitoring of learners' achievement of NVQ units. Individual learning plans are not updated as learners achieve units. The development of a workplace learning plan is not yet sufficiently established.

### **Leadership and management**

77. Management of the area of learning is satisfactory. Retention and achievement rates have been consistently good over a five-year period, albeit with low numbers of learners. Equality of opportunity monitoring is effective, with an introduction given at induction and reinforced at the periodic reviews. Learners are given a monthly newsletter which provides practical examples of equality of opportunity issues. Contact numbers are provided to allow learners to respond to problems. However, comments made on review forms in relation to equality of opportunity are often superficial and learners' awareness of these issues is insufficiently reinforced. Learners have access to information technology equipment and are encouraged to access drop-in facilities to improve their key skills.

78. NITAL effectively collects learners' views on their training. It regularly provides learners with surveys to seek their views but does not sufficiently follow up the return of the surveys. NITAL has actively encouraged the return of surveys by offering respondents the opportunity to win a music system, and this had provided a more positive response.

79. NITAL communicates well through regular monitoring visits with employers, who are involved with learners' reviews. Monitoring of college performance has improved but is not yet effectively established. The self-assessment process in this area of learning is mostly accurate in its identification of strengths and weaknesses.

**Business administration and law****Grade 3**

<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>
<b>Accounting and finance</b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	1	3
NVQ training for young people	2	3
<b>Administration</b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	19	3
<b>Customer service</b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	3	3

80. NITAL has 25 business administration and law learners, of whom 12 are apprentices, 11 are advanced apprentices and two are working towards NVQs. Nineteen of the 25 learners are following business administration, three are following customer services and three are following accounting and finance programmes. All learners are employed. Learners are recruited directly from employers, through Connexions and by NITAL's advertising. Four staff are involved in the assessment, internal verification and progress reviews of these programmes. The assessors visit learners' workplaces at least once a month with progress reviews every 12 weeks. Induction, off-the-job tuition and some assessment are provided in Corby to most learners.

*Strengths*

- well-supported learners and employers
- good-quality workplaces supporting progression and skills development

*Weaknesses*

- insufficient off-the-job learning
- weak progress reviews

**Achievement and standards**

81. Overall, retention rates are satisfactory. Twenty-one advanced apprentices were recruited between 2001-02 and 2005-06. For these, the retention rate has fluctuated between 100 per cent, in the four years when only one or two started, to 86 per cent in 2002-03 and 67 per cent in 2004-05. Four of the 11 still in learning started between 2000-01 and 2003-04. Thirty-five apprentices were recruited between 2001-02 and 2005-06. The retention rate has fluctuated between 100 per cent in 2002-03 and 44 per cent in 2003-04. Retention of the 11 NVQ learners recruited since 2001-02 was at 100 per cent until it dropped to 67 per cent for those starting in 2004-05.

82. Achievement rates have also fluctuated, but are generally satisfactory. For business administration apprentices, achievement rates were very good but have recently dropped. Twenty business administration advanced apprentices have started since 2001-02. Fifty-seven per cent of those starting in 2002-03 have completed their framework, with 29 per cent still in learning. Only one learner has completed from the other intakes, however. Of the 10 learners who have started the accounting NVQ at level 4 since 2002-03, achievement rates are good and improving. Of the seven customer service apprentices

starting since 2002-03, three have completed their qualification framework and one remains in learning. Advanced apprentices in customer service are making good progress with their qualifications. Development of workplace skills and knowledge is good for all customer service learners.

83. Learners benefit from good-quality workplaces that support their progression and development. They are well supported by their supervisors and other colleagues, some of whom have achieved the same qualifications. Training advisers work closely with learners and their supervisors to ensure that they gain the necessary competences in the workplace. Employers provide good on-the-job training. Learners make good use of a wide range of workplace evidence. In customer service, learners, employers and training advisers agree project-based tasks that will benefit the learner and employer, while providing good evidence for assessment. Employers are flexible in arranging work to suit learners' needs to take on tasks outside of their normal duties. Assessors discuss and review very thoroughly all evidence collected by learners. They use action plans effectively to agree short-term targets for learners to demonstrate competency. Learners have full ownership of their portfolios, which are organised and presented well. Many learners progress to higher levels of qualification with the encouragement of their employers. Some take on additional responsibilities very early in their careers. For example, an accounts assistant was promoted to finance manager within three or four months of moving to a new employer. Most employers allow learners time to work on their portfolios when work pressures permit, although a few do not.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

<b>LSC funded work-based learning</b>																
<b>Advanced apprenticeships</b>	<b>2005-06</b>		<b>2004-05</b>		<b>2003-04</b>		<b>2002-03</b>		<b>2001-02</b>		<b>2000-01</b>					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		9		2	100	7	100	1	100	1	100				
Retained*	0		0		1	50	6	86	1	100	1	100				
Successfully completed	0		0		1	50	4	57	0	0	1	100				
Still in learning	1		6		1	50	2	29	1	100	0	0				

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

<b>LSC funded work-based learning</b>																
<b>Apprenticeships</b>	<b>2005-06</b>		<b>2004-05</b>		<b>2003-04</b>		<b>2002-03</b>		<b>2001-02</b>							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		17		9		6	100	1	100						
Retained*	0		1		4		6	100	0	0						
Successfully completed	0		1		3		6	100	0	0						
Still in learning	2		9		1		0	0	0	0						

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	0		3		4	100	3	100	1	100						
Retained*	0		0		4	100	3	100	1	100						
Successfully completed	0		0		4	100	2	67	1	100						
Still in learning	0		2		0	0	0	0	0	0						

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

## The quality of provision

84. Learners and employers are supported well by NITAL's staff. Training advisers respond promptly and effectively to queries, complaints and problems raised by learners, their supervisors and their managers. They visit learners in their workplace at least once a month and operate flexibly in rescheduling appointments or making additional visits. Supervisors and managers attend learners' progress reviews and invariably meet training advisers during their assessment visits. Training staff work hard to remove any barriers to learning and are always accessible. Learners contact staff by e-mail or on their mobile phones and visit them in NITAL's Corby headquarters. Employers and learners receive personal copies of regular reports on learners' progress. Training advisers give sound guidance to learners and their supervisors, for example on the level of qualification most suitable to a learner's current and potential future work. They do not hesitate to change a learner's course level early on in their programme if necessary. The good relations with, and effective support received from, their training advisers motivates learners and helps to build employers' confidence in their learners and in NITAL.

85. Initial assessment is satisfactory. This successfully identified learners' additional needs in relation to literacy, numeracy, language and key skills. Support for key skills is satisfactory. Few learners need to take all key skills qualifications as many are exempt. Many learners agree to take key skills qualifications at levels above those prescribed for their courses. However, in some cases, assessors do not correct spelling and punctuation errors in learners' portfolios and have not brought these to the learners' attention so that they can improve their performance.

86. Most business administration learners benefit from the monthly training day provided at NITAL's offices. They enjoy meeting learners from other employers and hearing about their experiences at work. Accountancy learners attend college day-release classes. There is no vocational off-the-job training for customer service learners. Key skills support sessions are available for all learners. Some learners have insufficient access to off-the-job training, particularly where employers set excessive work pressures or where learners find travel to Corby difficult. Some accounting learners have to attend evening classes in their own time. Training advisers are working to persuade employers to remove these restrictions. The importance of proper induction and regular off-the-job training is explained to employers at the outset but this has not had the desired effect with some. Some learners have missed the comprehensive two-day induction course in Corby provided for all programmes and have had to complete it on an individual basis in the workplace. Learners demonstrate good recall of topics covered during induction.

87. Progress reviews are weak. They neither inform nor develop learners sufficiently. Some reviews are brief with insufficient input from learners. Although supervisors attend reviews they do not participate actively. Learners' own assessors carry out some reviews while others are carried out by reviewers who have insufficient understanding of the qualifications under review. Some first reviews do not take place within the first 12 weeks of learners' programmes. Full use is not made of the prescribed review process, with only cursory discussion of some important aspects taking place. Equality and diversity are dealt with through asking learners a selection of closed questions from a long list. Learners' answers are recorded without any further discussion. This neither reinforces nor develops learners' understanding of the issues involved. Valuable opportunities to explore significant points are not taken through adoption of this box-ticking approach to progress reviews. Longer-term targets are not covered adequately. Some learners are unsure of the planned end-dates of their learning programmes.

### **Leadership and management**

88. The management of programmes is satisfactory. Any problems are raised at regular staff meetings and also informally. They are generally dealt with promptly and effectively. Staff work well as a team and have a strong shared desire to make improvements. Suggestions, complaints and other feedback from learners and employers is taken seriously. Assessment and internal verification are satisfactory, although two training advisers are still working towards these qualifications. Most training staff have adequate vocational experience. They are observed during assessments and receive useful feedback. Learners' progress is monitored closely and training staff receive frequent feedback on their performance. Understanding of equality of opportunity is at least satisfactory and learners feel protected from bullying and harassment. Off-the-job training resources in NITAL's Corby headquarters are satisfactory, although these are used mainly by business administration learners. Staff contributed to the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is appropriately critical and recognises several of the strengths and weaknesses identified during inspection.

